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THE WORLD: GOD'S CREATION



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most of mankind attempted to suppress its despair arising from being denied its ordained fulfillment because mankind was caged, even though it was unaware of being caged.

We see this universal restlessness all around us now at a level that far exceeds anything before in the history of mankind.

The God-seer Moses revealed to mankind both its origin and its sin and the boundary of its cage. Mankind came from the Lord, Who was its Father from beyond creation; yet there was now a barrier between God and man, the barrier of the law of sin and of the earthly or carnal mind. Moses revealed the shadow which darkened our lives, the shadow of the law of our nature and existence.

When God formed human beings in the beginning, He used to speak to them personally, in a way that was possible for human beings to understand Him. And even when all humankind fell into evil ways, the Creator of all did not abandon the human race. Instead when they proved unworthy of His converse with them, He wanted to renew His love for them; He sent them letters as you do to people far away from you, and this drew all humankind back again to Him. It was God Who sent them letters, Moses who delivered them. What do the letters say? "In the beginning God made heaven and earth."

(From St. John Chrysostom's Second Homily on Genesis)

St. John proclaims the New Genesis, our true freedom, when he pronounced "In the beginning was the Word." He informs us of the Word, the Lord, the enhypostatic Truth, that created all things, Who has now come to remake us, to give us rebirth as "sons of God". The boundaries and limitations of our nature have been lifted by the Creator Himself, and the wall of enmity and sin has been torn down. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Not simply the knowledge of the truth, but we come to know Truth itself, the enhypostatic Truth, the incarnate Son of God Himself, Who has come to free us from the bonds of sin and to invigorate our stunted, fallen nature through communion with Him. "If the son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). Only the living presence of the Truth in His church can truly make us free. Then the barriers of creation fall down because of the true presence of the living, uncreated God.

A talk given by His Grace, Bishop Moses at Saint Nektarios parish in Toronto, November 25, 1999. It is an edited version of a lecture presented by Hieromonk Haralampos at the HOCNA Clergy Synaxis on October 5, 1999.

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"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." These words begin our sacred history; the history of the origin of the world and of our origin, the cause for all subsequent events. Moreover, our history records the Creator's plan for us, and the very fact that there is a God. Creation's destiny is to aid man fulfill his destiny. Creation is "both a school and a training place where the souls of men should be taught" (Hexaemeron, St. Basil, 1:5, Post Nicene Fathers, Series II, vol. 8, pg. 54). The world was formed "for a useful end, for the great advantage of all beings, since it is really the school where they exercise themselves, the training ground where they learn to know God; since by the sight of visible and sensible things, the mind is led, as by a hand, to the contemplation of invisible things" (ibid, pg. 55). How man in his freedom of will frustrated for a time God's will set in motion the subsequent events of history.

We differentiate the words of the God-seer Moses from the other ancient myths and philosophies and their descendants when we call his words the true revelation of God. Of course, this judgment belongs to faith; yet our Faith can be discerned as being truthful and factual even in its outward or objective expressions when compared with all other religions or philosophies. The account of our sacred history is different from any other religion or philosophy: a strong indication that our Faith is uniquely from God.

First, in examining myths, we observe that the world was created by beings who existed or who were born during a First Time or the Golden Age, the time of perfection where the story of the creation of the world and the relationship between the gods explains the cause and reason for the present condition of the world. These gods, which are man written large, are the exemplars for the culture. According to the various myths sometimes the world, much as we know it, existed, but more often, it came into existence or was formed by these gods through murder, thievery, dismemberment, coition, or fraud, through mistake or accident or intended catastrophe. Indeed, the whole spectrum of human foibles was exhibited in the myths of the creation of the world. For example, in the Babylonian cosmogony, Bel Marduk conquers the primordial serpent Tiamat. Dismembering it, Marduk uses Tiamat's bones for the rocks and land, its blood for the water, etc. Other myths from elsewhere relate how various gods formed the world from their own substance. All of them, however, possess this common feature: matter or beings exist before the

creation of the present world, which is of the same nature as those who formed it. Since the gods, then, are not of a different substance, the substance of the world is eternal, without a beginning.

The innovation in thinking made by the Greek philosophers refined the explanations of the origin of the universe. The ancestral gods were pretty much retired from action with respect to creation. The Ionian philosophers considered the elements as principles of creation; one preferred fire, another water, and so on. Democritus taught that the movement of the atoms in joining and parting formed the universe. Plato believed that the world was the reflection of the "ideas", which are the eternal exemplars.

Without going into much detail or analysis of the philosophic schools, we observe that the mythmakers and the philosophers think the same way: the universe always exists or the matter from which it is formed is eternal. There is always some pre-existing matter or substance.

The images and concepts of the mythmakers and philosophers were limited by their material substance and existence. When they attempted to explain the origin of the world, the existence of matter, in some form or another, is assumed. The ever-recurring cycles of nature on earth and in the heavens, where no beginning or end is readily discernible, give the impression of an eternal succession. This is circular time, the eternal return, which is an important characteristic of ancient myths and philosophies. Countless myths have arisen from the seeding, growth, and harvest of vegetation. Numerous accounts exist of mother goddesses, symbols of the earth, which must annually be offered blood and sacrifices as payment for the bounties of nature and agriculture. The Greek philosophers also did not escape this frame of mind. The Stoic philosophers, for example, believed that time was circular and ever-recurring, that the universe would end in a conflagration from which another universe would arise that would be exactly the same as the prior one. In other words matter, the stuff of the universe, has always existed and ever shall. Since matter possesses the attributes of eternal subsistence and infinity, which attributes only the divinity might possess, the universe becomes in some measure divine. Anyway, it is definitely the substratum or cause of all life.

On the contrary, God's revelation proclaims that there is a beginning; it proclaims that God alone created the heaven and earth and that He gave them their beginning; and that they are not of His essence, but contingent upon His will. This pronouncement is unique in history. Only the Church has received it and understood it; nowhere else has any

al and enhypostatic [distinctly subsistent] Power" ...[and the Holy Spirit] through Himself creating and giving substance to the universe, sanctifying it and sustaining it." [ibid, I, 8] The will for creation comes forth from the Father, is fulfilled by the Son, and is sustained and perfected and returned to the Father by the Holy Spirit.

The first verse of Genesis sets the boundaries of our knowledge, the limit of our nature and its capacity. All mankind could not by itself conceive of anything beyond the phenomenal world, beyond creation. Having no experience of anything such, they could have no knowledge of it. The prophet Moses was first to impart to mankind the knowledge of the boundary we have spoken of, inasmuch as he learned it from God. Moses revealed that man was truly caged in creation by his ignorance of the living God.

Man, however, had unconsciously felt the chains of his imprisonment. God had created the universe in order to draw man towards Himself; such was man's destiny; for as Ecclesiasticus says, "God created man for life." Psalm 81:6 declares, "I said, ye are gods; and all of you children of the Most High." Also, St. Paul writes, "The earnest expectation of the creature [or: creation] waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19). This destiny, thwarted by the fall of our first parents, yet remained as a constituent of our nature, and produced a void, a nameless yearning which could not be assuaged by any material creature. This yearning, being unfulfilled, produced a slowly growing dissatisfaction, a feeling of estrangement, a rebellion against the constraints of this world, a sense of frustration and oppression. His inherent potential for knowledge and life beyond the created sphere being stifled, man remained unknowingly trapped in the chrysalis of this world. Searching for what he knew not, he craved for release, like animals in a cage.

All cultures have necessarily had opportunities for man to forget or deaden this oppression, to relieve the tension of dissatisfaction, to let off steam. Since they could not transcend the reality of the material world, they substituted periodic escapes from the strictures of their society and culture through various festivals. The Romans had the Saturnalia, where the masters served the slaves, and the slaves took the place of their masters. The Greeks had Dionysian revels. In the middle ages, the noble's courts would be governed during Twelfth Night by the Lord of Misrule, where all were at his command to perform ludicrous forfeits. Carnival also, from then till now, had a similar function. During these times there was often much license and an overturning of social barriers, with much drunkenness. In this manner, through revels and bacchanalian festivals,

supernatural powers are inherent in the earth, in crystals, or in the other elements.

We conclude that in the myths, philosophies, magic, and the sciences, a common factor is that their thinking cannot transcend the boundaries and limitations of human nature to experience anything beyond this creation. Their beliefs and speculations concerning the origin of the universe and of life, therefore, can find only material causes, which results in making matter to be eternal. The ancient dictum of the Holy Fathers holds true for them all: they have abandoned the living God and made created matter their god.

As we have said, creation *ex nihilo* has been the doctrine understood in the first words of Genesis. The words "beginning" and "created" prove that the world had a beginning and was not from everlasting and is not eternal, for what has a beginning and has been created is corruptible and subject to change and, therefore, can have an end. The creation is not divine but exists because of God's will. He could have not created, because He is subject to no necessity. Creation depends upon God's will, which is a divine operation or energy, and not upon His essence. Creation in itself can have no divine attributes, since it has no essential connection with the divine nature. God created the world from nothing can be a misleading phrase for us, since both language and our minds objectify everything. However, as we said, real nothing itself cannot be an object or have any substance. The purpose of the phrase is to make us understand that there was no pre-existent matter. Nor does God make a space for this nothing or for creation since He is omnipresent. Creation is completely "other", completely different from God: not a difference of space but a difference of nature. The beginning is a boundary, an indivisible and inviolable limit for created nature, for all of the heaven and the earth, which God made all at once, in less than an instant. Then time and its succession also began, coterminous with created matter. Because of this boundary, creation has no connection with anything preceding except the will of God. Matter did not pre-exist or arise spontaneously.

Since creation is by God's will, the entire Holy Trinity is joined in the act of creation. St. Irenaeus calls the Son and the Holy Spirit the two hands of the Father in the work of creation. St. John Damascene says, "By thinking, God creates and the thought becomes the work, with the Word fulfilling it and the Spirit perfecting it" [Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, II, 2] and in another place, "The Father does [creates] all whatsoever He does [creates] through His Only-begotten Son, not as though the Son were some useful instrument, but as through His natur-

like statement been found. Aside from the first words of Genesis, the first clear scriptural enunciation of this doctrine is in II Maccabees 7:28: "I beseech thee, my son, look upon the heaven and the earth and all that is therein, and consider that God made them of what was not (or: what did not exist); and so was man made likewise". (*Ex ouk onton*) is ungrammatical and would have normally been (*ek me onton*), "of things that were not", but the *ouk* is used to emphasize non-existence. Language is limited and couched in material terms, therefore the phrase "of things that were not" would have normally been interpreted in the pagan manner, that God shaped a formless matter. Although the expressions of language might be limited, the true teaching of creation was known in Israel because God's presence opened the understanding. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church also insures that revelation is not distorted, and that God's creation out of nothing—*ex nihilo*—is affirmed as a fundamental dogma of the Faith.

The revealed dogma that there was no pre-existence of creation or of any form of matter, but that it sprang into existence completely and instantaneously at the word of God, by His will only, was impossible for carnal man to conceive. Material man can only conceive of a material universe, since he has had no experience of anything different. He is limited by the boundaries of his nature. Even men's thoughts and conceptions are material, both in themselves, since our thoughts are formed in the brain by bioelectrical energy, and in the image which the thought visualizes. Even when we say "created of nothing", an image forms of a black space, but necessarily with a border since the image is contained in our mind. We cannot imagine a void or the infinite, because we ourselves are finite and material.

We are bound by the limits of our nature. All our conceptions and mental images and words are necessarily material, and when conceiving something spiritual or noetic or the divine, the mind objectifies it necessarily. The ancient mythmakers and philosophers, therefore, could not conceive of a creation *ex nihilo* since it was entirely outside their experience. As Plato said, everything is bound by the necessity of its nature, i.e., nothing can surpass its own limitations or the boundaries of its capacities. A dog cannot preach a sermon, nor, to quote a famous author, can a man spontaneously grow eighteen inches. We cannot lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Consequently, the cosmic, linear time of the Bible is a unique belief. Creation and matter had a definite beginning, and, therefore, could have an end. This was a foreign conception, even unthinkable, to the mythmakers and philosophers, who only perceived

cosmic time as a cycle of constant recurrence in eternal matter.

We stated that the philosophers and mythmakers made the universe God, even if not explicitly, since they attributed divine characteristics to it. There were other religions and philosophers, however, who explicitly deified the universe, who believed that the universe is God itself: the pantheists. Most notable among them are the Hindus, where the substance of all things is the god Brahma, while matter is Maya, illusion. The Gnostics also believed that all creation arises from the emanations of a deity or of several deities. Their systems are so varied and confused, that it is hardly worth investigating them. Most seem to presuppose that the divine sphere is true existence while matter is evil, a pollution and degradation. A deity or emanation falls and becomes matter or is imprisoned in it and becomes ignorant. It can only return to the divine sphere when freed from matter through an esoteric knowledge. This fall and return is also true of the individual soul, either through association or identity with the divine. In any case, the divinity does not create matter; it pre-exists in opposition to the divine.

The philosopher Plotinus taught that the divine unity – called the One – emanates from itself and becomes many, through some unexplained, continual process of extension or condensation. This proliferation weakens, defiles, or devaluates these emanations so that they become matter, yet the ontological connection exists; matter has a basic identity with the One divinity. Because of this pantheistic identity, the possibility exists of a return, of the dissolution of the many back into the One. This return is usually the supreme goal of such religions and philosophies.

Modern science, although it rejects any consideration of God as a factor in the created world, holds to the position of the aforementioned mythologies and philosophies, i.e., creation is eternal. Matter has existed and will exist forever in some form or other. Whether the Big Bang Theory is advocated or the Steady State Theory, always something exists as a ground state to produce the universe. This is the old belief restated: the universe is endowed with the divine attributes of eternity and creation, and, more particularly, the creation of life. Modern scientists may deny any religious content to their theories when challenged, but when speaking or writing, many often express awe and an almost worshipful admiration of creation. The most telling proof, however, is their attributing a teleological principle to the universe, either implicitly or explicitly. Although their theories reject any volition or divine intervention or plan in the universe, they tacitly assume or accept that there is a movement or

development in the universe. This development, however, is never really explained or accounted for by their theories. Darwinism is a prime example. It speaks of and describes the impersonal force of "evolution" but that begs the question of the how and why of its existence. Darwinism is forced to accept this assumption because the whole of creation is a fly in the nose of their specious theories.

Experiments which have tried to duplicate the creation of life in the theoretical, primordial protein soup of the Darwinists have not only been complete failures, but have been powerful indications, if not proof, that no such condition ever existed; and if it did, it certainly did not spontaneously produce living matter.

The grudging or unacknowledged imputing of divine characteristics to creation by most scientists, is lacking in Henri Bergson and Teilhard du Chardin. They present a god who arises from the universe and is developing and not yet perfect. He will be perfected in the future, as the culmination of all creation through a spiritual or mental development.

Since these theories have arisen from human reasoning, they are all limited by human nature. Even the theories which try, at least, to account for the history of human religious experience, insist vehemently and dogmatically that God is part of the physical universe. They consciously reject the Christian doctrine, for they have the same frame of mind and experience as the ancient mythmakers and philosophers. They are not able to transcend their limits, since they will not accept the revelation recorded in the Scriptures and the Church. Most physical scientists are limited because they preclude any sort of metaphysical inquiry or proof and, at times, turn mental somersaults in their attempts to attribute every cause to the material world.

As the myths and history prove, and as many philosophers admit, humanity has always acknowledged some kind of supernatural activity, perhaps arising from a memory remnant of God's ancient revelation to mankind through angels, or some personally experienced supernatural activity. In any case, something beyond the visible is believed or visible things are imbued with a supernatural power. To a greater or lesser degree, however, such a description would also fit magic, ancient or modern, which credits the physical with some inherent power beyond its physical nature. For example, salt is supposed to purify every evil influence or destroy spells. Sometimes cold iron or the rowan tree, the herbs moly and dittany have the same protective property. Various combinations of herbs and objects prepared in a particular manner will produce supernatural effects. In modern witchery or New Age occultism, some